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ABSTRACT

Three aspects of problems, issues, and questions facing curriculum development teams, local authority advisors, and teacher trainers interested in helping teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) construct and shape an effective economics curriculum are examined. First, in an investigation of the curriculum context dimension, the paper predicts that the 1990's will see all young people in the UK receiving an economics education as part of their general education. Although what form(s) it will take and in what stages it will occur remain far from clear, it will be the decision of schools themselves that will frame the research questions and responses of curriculum developers and economics educators to the curriculum context problem. Second, in an examination of economic literacy, the paper considers how existing work in the UK on the nature of economic literacy will assist teachers in judging whether their 16-year old students are economically literate and whether or not their economics curriculum is 'of a worthwhile scale.' Third, the teacher training dimension of economics education is considered including implications for teacher training, the extent to which the needs of existing and future teachers are being met, and the relevancy of current initiatives. (LH)

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TOWARDS ECONOMICS IN AN ENTITLEMENT CURRICULUM

by

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In: Economics Education: Research and Development Issues. Paper presented at the International Research Seminar held at the University of London July 30 - August 1, 1985.

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Towards economics in an entitlement curriculum

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One recent change in educational thinking in the UK is to regard economic awareness as an essential component of an entitlement curriculum for all school students. In this paper three aspects of this development are discussed. Where in an already overcrowded school curriculum is a place for economics to be found? How is an entitlement economics curriculum to be described? What are the implications for teacher training and how relevant are current initiatives?

Introduction

> During the five secondary years, every pupil should study, on a worthwhile scale, history, geography, and, under whatever guise (which may in some cases be history or geography), the principles underlying a free society and some basic economic awareness. But choices will have to be made in years 4 and 5. Is it acceptable that any of these three elements can be dropped in these two years? (Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office, September 1984, paragraph 22)

In recent years in the UK economics education has been of increasing interest to educationalists, industrialists and those responsible for outlining national policies on the curriculum in secondary schools. The quotation heading this paper is the latest in a line of statements which refer to notions of basic economic awareness or economic literacy. It encapsulates many of the issues, problems and questions which confront curriculum development teams, local authority advisers and teacher trainers whose task it is to help teachers in schools to construct and shape an effective economics curriculum for the students in their charge. Three aspects of these problems are considered in this paper. First, the curriculum context dimension is investigated:

> Where in the secondary school curriculum are programmes designed to promote economic literacy likely to be placed?
> At what stages in the five years of secondary schooling are they likely to become available?

Second, the economic literacy dimension is examined:

> How does existing UK work on the nature of economic literacy assist teachers to judge the worthiness of their efforts?

Third, the teacher training dimension is considered:

> What are the implications for teacher training of a move towards school economic literacy programmes?
> To what extent are the needs of existing and future teachers being met?

Curriculum context

Holley and Skelton (1980) recommended that the second stage of the Economics Education 14–16 Project* should be primarily concerned with the extension of economics as a separate subject ('core' or 'option') but that sufficient flexibility should be maintained to ensure that contributions could be made to the development of economics education through multidisciplinary social science/social studies courses or through the teaching of other subjects in the curriculum. Their emphasis on economics as a separate subject is based on predictions made by headteachers in a survey of schools in England and Wales conducted between 1976 and 1978. Those forecasts, with their emphasis on economics as a discrete subject, do not appear to have stood the test of time. Whilst there has been a welcome and significant increase in interest and involvement in economics education in recent years, statistical evidence clearly reveals that the explosive growth in separate subject examination economics at 16+ implied in Holley and Skelton's work has not materialized. Indeed, subsequent developments serve to illustrate the failure of the headteachers in the survey to predict the changes that would occur even in their own schools. They also highlight how thinking about the role of economics in the curriculum has changed since the mid-1970s when Holley and Skelton's work was carried out.

Signs that the climate of opinion was already changing by 1980 were evident in the views of the Economics Education 14–16 Project's Phase 2 development team. Ryba (1984, p. 144), for example, wrote, 'Accepting the current realities of schooling, we have been particularly concerned to formulate materials as capable of being used across the curriculum as within economics courses themselves.' Despite holding these views at the outset of its work, the

*The Economics Education 14–16 Project is sponsored by the Economics Association. Phase 1 (1976–78), based at Hull University, was directed by Brian Holley and was a major investigation into the extent of economics education 14–16 and the perceived needs of headteachers, teachers and their students. The results of the enquiries were published by the National Foundation for Educational Research in 1980. Phase 2 (1980–83) was directed by Raymond Ryba at Manchester University and was particularly concerned with the development of exemplar curriculum materials aimed at providing a basis for the extension of economics education across the whole ability range 14–16. These materials were published by Longman in October 1985.

development team must have been surprised at the variety of curriculum contexts in which economics was said to be taught when data was gathered on the use of Project materials in a network of pilot schools in 1981–82 (Ryba and Hodkinson, 1985). Since then, co-operative work with some 150 schools has served to reinforce the writer's view that economics is least likely to become available to all school students in single subject form.*

The Secretaries of State for Education and for Wales clearly recognize and support the development of economic awareness programmes in schools – their 1984 note emphasizes this. It is reasonable to infer, however, that their major concern is not with separate subject economics. Basic economic awareness programmes appear to be acceptable to them 'under whatever guise'. They particularly link such programmes with history and geography, and appear to see them go hand in hand with what they describe as 'the principles underlying a free society'. Guidance on curriculum context at national level is, therefore, far from clear. On the one hand, the possibility of an integrated humanities approach which encompasses elements of economics and political science is hinted at and, on the other, there is an assumption that economic awareness programmes can be taught through the medium of history or geography.

This 'confusion of curriculum possibilities' that exists for economic awareness programmes is in fact even broader than appears at first sight, for it has to be seen in the context of an education system whose tradition is one of local rather than national guidelines and, in economics, of local rather than national enterprise. Initiatives taken by individual local education authorities and individual schools within them are therefore vital pieces in the curriculum context jigsaw. In some local education authorities, where the government-financed Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative aims to reorientate the 14–18 curriculum for some students in a selected number of schools/colleges, economic awareness schemes are finding a slot in vocationally orientated business courses rather than in the traditional humanities subjects. In some other local education authorities, modular arrangements are in operation in which basic economic awareness is seen to be firmly established within general studies and personal and social education courses. Manchester Education Committee (1982), for example, in its document entitled 'A curriculum for today and tomorrow' provides a clear guideline to its schools on the need for economic awareness modules within contemporary studies and personal and social education courses. At the other extreme, however, many other local education authorities remain uncommitted even at the level of general statements of policy.

If it is accepted that economics education for all school students can and should occur 'under whatever guise' and that the individual and distinctive lines of development described above are to be supported, then curriculum developers and teacher trainers have to meet the challenge of ensuring that

*Phase 3 of the Project (1983–86) is a phase of activities in which a central team is co-operating with groups of local authority schools to introduce programmes of economic awareness across the ability range at 14–16 years. The writer is a member of the development team.

each line of development results in a curriculum in which the economics component is both 'worthwhile' and contains useful economic concepts and ideas.

This challenge is, however, only one part of the curriculum context problem, for the Secretaries of State point to the possibility of another and perhaps more significant longer-term development that must be faced. They ask whether it would be acceptable for economic awareness to be dropped from a student's curriculum at 14–16 years. Implicit in this question is the view that, irrespective of provision at 14–16 years, economic awareness programmes will be present in one or more of the first three years of secondary schooling. If such an interpretation is intended, then it represents a major development in government thinking on the role of economics in the curriculum. Moreover, it comes at a time when

1 current sponsorship of curriculum development in economics education is mainly aimed at 14–16 year olds

2 new initiatives in the 16–19 age range (Youth Training Scheme, Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education, AS levels) may lead to a switch of current resources and development

3 research and development on economics in the 11–14 curriculum in the UK has stagnated for almost a decade (the last major initiative was in Scotland in the early 1970s)

4 some writers have expressed the view that some aspects of economics may be beyond very young children (Henderson, 1985, p. 41)

5 the number of researchers engaged in economics education is low (a register of current research carried out by Whitehead in 1983 on behalf of the Economics Association indicated few researchers in a small number of institutions)

Such a development in national guidelines presents the academic community with a series of research and development tasks. Schools also face a major challenge if economics has to be seen as part of a mainstream entitlement curriculum and if continuity of economics experience has to be provided. In these circumstances, a decision to allow students to opt out of economics in years 4 and 5 could only be made in the knowledge that learning experiences at 11–14 years had met that entitlement. At the same time, traditional examination courses in economics at 16+ would assume their correct place as an extension/enrichment of that entitlement in contrast to being viewed as the entitlement itself.

It now seems likely that the decade of the 1990s will see all young people receiving an economics education as part of their general education. What form(s) it will eventually take and at which stage(s) it will occur remain far from clear. But it seems very likely that it will be the decisions of schools themselves which will frame the research questions and responses of curriculum developers and economics educators to the curriculum context problem.

Ready-made answers to the economics curriculum problems schools now face did not emerge from economics research and development activities in the 1970s. Indeed, Holley and Skelton (1980) did not recognize many of the problems as likely to occur. Moreover, whilst government seems to be firmly committed to the notion of economics education, it appears to be prepared to endorse the individual decisions of schools and local education authorities rather than to give firm guidance on the precise nature of its development.

Economic literacy

If the major thrust of development in the 11–16 economics curriculum in the late 1980s and early 1990s is towards the development of economic awareness components within a broad range of courses and not towards separate subject economics option courses for examination at 16+, then two major questions arise. What will be included in these programmes to allow schools to describe their 16 year old students as economically literate? What criteria are schools to use to judge whether or not their economics curriculum is 'of a worthwhile scale'?

Much has been written and said about the school curriculum over the past 10 years and references to economics education are included in that literature (DES [Department of Education and Science], 1977; Economics Association, 1977; Hodkinson and Thomas, 1984; Atkinson, 1985). It is not the purpose of this paper to review these contributions in detail – that has been done elsewhere. Henderson, for example, shows himself to be less than satisfied with the statement by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) on the objectives of economics education (DES, 1977):

> It is hard to approve of this kind of muddle as a clear and useful set of objectives for economics education. If they were to constitute a starting point, all of the statements . . . would require rigorous analysis to prevent us from falling into the trap of teaching either rationality . . . or conformity to an existing order or notions of 'good' economic policy and behaviour not founded on (say) welfare economics. (Henderson, 1985, p. 36)

However, for a number of reasons it is important to discuss the usefulness of objectives set out in such documents as potential guidelines for teachers involved in the planning and teaching of economic awareness programmes. First, many teachers who are not trained in economics will be responsible for the economics curriculum and will require such guidance. Second, despite the fact that the Economics Education 14–16 Project, in co-operation with institutions, local education authorities and others, has established a growing number of potentially autonomous networks of schools which can work together on economic awareness programmes, many others will continue to work in isolation for some years to come. The majority of teachers will, therefore, inevitably rely on such published material, their own instincts or a mix of both. Moreover, whilst many general and social education courses

recognize and emphasize general personal and social awareness and problem-solving skills as outcomes of the educational process, experience of working with such schools on behalf of the Economics Education 14–16 Project has led the writer to conclude that schools have much greater difficulty when asked to express their objectives in terms of the subject contexts in which such skills are to be developed. This latter problem may of course be particular to economics education because of its long association with an A level style education rather than with the mainstream of the 11–16 curriculum.

The main purpose of documents produced by HMI (DES, 1977) and the Economics Association (1977) is to discuss the contribution that a study of economics might make to certain areas of curriculum experience, that is to establish and justify the case for including economics in the curriculum of all young people. Their intention is to consider the broad objectives of economics education in the later years of compulsory education and not to provide specific guidelines for teachers as to the meaning of economic literacy. However, the Economics Association's document, for example, has come to be used in this context. Ryba and Hodkinson (1985, pp. 113–14) recommend it in these terms:

> Given the pressures on the curriculum, and the limitations on what can be attempted with the least able pupils, that minimum [level of competence] can only be related to the provision of access for all youngsters to a starter kit of knowledge, skills and attitudes, from which later development, whether in more advanced courses or in the 'school of life', can develop safely. That minimum level is what is meant by economic literacy. Of what does it consist? Obviously there are many different views. But the findings of the Economics Association's ad hoc committee on 'The Contribution of Economics to General Education' offers a carefully considered starting point.

Holley and Skelton (1980 pp. 186–7) are another source of advice to teachers on the economics curriculum at 14–16.

> The context of the economics element at 14–16 should consist of a blend of personal economics, commercial and industrial organisation, economic issues and basic economic concepts. The relative importance of each component should vary with the ability level of the pupil.

Their detailed recommendations provide what amounts to a course outline which might be seen to provide teachers with the basis for course planning.

Taken together these documents provide an awesome list of topics and concepts 'to be covered' or 'selected from' and of 'skills to be learned'. What they do not provide with any clarity or detail is the economics framework through which these topics can be investigated and the concepts and skills mastered. To some extent they address themselves to the less complex issues facing teachers – those of identifying themes, and listing topics, skills and so on. There is emphasis on product rather than process, on the outcomes of investigation rather than on the means by which it is carried out. There is, for example, little reference to a broader notion of economic literacy which would 'look at problem forming, problem setting, the questioning process,

problem refining, analysis and solution . . . moving away from economics as a ready-made subject with a predetermined product and simple ends-dominated purposes and . . . towards it as something with which students and teachers are more speculatively involved' (Henderson, 1985, p. 40).

It seems clear to the writer that it is this latter notion of economic literacy that offers the key for teachers in schools. It releases them from the tyranny of content to be covered or described, a list impossible to be pursued in any meaningful way given the scarcity of available 'core' curriculum time for economics. Is it not possible that schools who use the lists described by HMI, the Economics Association and Holley and Skelton as a yardstick against which to measure the 'worthwhile scale' of their operations in economics may be tempted to conclude (and perhaps wrongly) that what they are able to offer falls short of what is either expected of them or deemed to be necessary? Is it not also possible that, in the face of this content emphasis, some schools will resort to description rather than analysis and to imparting knowledge rather than to problem solving; and thus incur the wrath of HMI and the Economics Association?

On the other hand, an approach to economic literacy which emphasizes the process of economic investigation and the procedures used by economists to analyse and interpret the economic system will capture for schools both the essence of the discipline and establish the criteria by which the scale of an entitlement economics education might be judged.

Such a development is not without its problems, as Henderson (1985, p. 41) points out:

> The view of the objective of economics education as being to understand the evolution and purpose of economics discourse is novel. There does not exist as yet . . . any considerable body of direct research into the nature of such discourse and problems pupils have in coping with it.

However, a literature which attempts to describe this broader view of economic literacy is beginning to emerge (Hodkinson and Thomas, 1984; Economics Association, 1984). In these writings, the purposes of economic awareness programmes are described as follows:

> In our view only those who grasp those economic facts – the meaning of the part they play in the system, the nature of their individual contribution and its effect upon the system – can be expected to cope constructively with its power and influence. If this is so, our students are entitled to expect their educational system to provide them with the means to attain that position. Economics education has a crucial role to play in this process, since it is only through an economics perspective that students can achieve sufficient objectivity to ensure a realistic scrutiny and evaluation of the economic issues and problems, experiences and policies, that confront individuals and nations. (Hodkinson and Thomas, 1984, p. 6)

Integral to the proposals is a questioning process, 'the economics perspective', which allows young people to enquire into the use of scarce resources by individuals, industrial, commercial and other groups in a country to achieve

certain ends. National and international decisions about the use of scarce resources are also seen to be key contexts for enquiry. An example of a possible framework of questions is included in Appendix D of Linda Thomas's paper.

Using the questioning process used by economists as the framework by which resources can be devised and the information, concepts and skills required to investigate a problem or issue identified, is to view economic literacy as Keynes (1973) did, as 'a branch of logic, a way of thinking'. If accepted by teachers, such an approach provides a set of criteria which allows programmes of work at all levels of analysis to be planned (see, for example, Hodkinson and Thomas, 1984, pp. 11–18) – the purposes of economic literacy programmes are set out; the contexts for investigation are described (viz. any decision which involves the use of scarce resources); a problem-solving approach is recommended; and a framework of questions to structure that approach is provided. Henderson rightly warns that much more work needs to be done. However, such an approach does seem to offer a means by which young people will

> . . . be able to look at a single economic problem (at macro or micro level), to understand it and to be able to discuss it sensibly, to consider possible solutions and to weigh up the likely outcomes of each (and therefore its merits) in economic terms. (Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development, 1985)

Teacher training

Any major change in emphasis in the school curriculum requires a response from teacher training to ensure that it is carried into the classroom. Arguably, those who are currently teaching economics in schools are best placed to take on this new challenge. However, their number is few when set against the whole school population 11–16, their existing commitments many and the tiny flow of newly trained specialist economics teachers insufficient. (In 1985, for example, less than 100 graduates are being trained as economics teachers, and the proportion of these who will enter teaching is not known.) On the other hand, if it is accepted that economics education for all can and should occur 'under whatever guise', then an acceptance of the fact that it can and should be taught by teachers other than specialist economists is implied.

In the field of initial teacher training, the Secretaries of State for Education and the Welsh Office have recognized and accepted this situation. From 1986 all training institutions have been requested to ensure that all students following courses of initial training

> . . . have a basic understanding . . . of the relationships between the adult world and what is taught in schools, in particular, ways in which pupils can be helped to acquire an understanding of the values of a free society and its economic and other foundations. (Department of Education and Science, Circular 3/84, p. 9)

To what extent this request will have an immediate impact on initial training courses will depend on the energy and rigour with which local professional committees, HMI and the members of the government's accreditation council carry out their course inspections. The response in the writer's own institution has been encouraging and speedy:

1 to include 'economic and industrial awareness' in its programme of 'core' lecture studies

2 to plan for a professional 'option' course in 'economic and industrial awareness' which will be open to all trainees

3 to seek to strengthen its links with local schools so that all trainees have the opportunity to see economic literacy programmes in operation and to discuss them with teachers

4 to seek to strengthen its teaching staff so that its involvement in initial training (and in-service training) can be extended

Such plans will inevitably take time to come to fruition and additional resources to ensure effectiveness may be limited. Other institutions may be less well placed to respond quickly and, in those (the majority) where economics education is not well established, progress may well depend upon outside stimulus and examples of practice.

Whatever the pace at which this development occurs, the recognition by the Secretaries of State of the need for all teachers in training to be economically literate and to have an understanding of how school students can become so, is to be welcomed and supported.

To confine a discussion of teacher training to prospective entrants to the profession is to ignore the important fact that the vast majority of teachers who will be responsible for teaching the economic awareness component in the school curriculum are already teaching in schools. Theirs is an in-service training need with major implications for the allocation of resources to training. Moreover, if the economics curriculum is to be implemented largely by non-specialists, then training provision has to be both carefully developed and supported in the schools themselves. Just as achievement of the goal of economics education for all implies a shift for economics from the periphery of the curriculum to its centre, so must this change of emphasis be reflected in in-service teacher training.

Many local education authorities have recognized some of these implications and are working with groups like the Economics Education 14–16 Project, the Economics Research and Curriculum Unit at London University's Institute of Education and with industry and commerce. The 'Learning for a Changing World Project' is one example of co-operative effort. British Petroleum plc, in conjunction with the Economics Education 14–16 Project and the Careers Research Advisory Centre, has devised a three-year programme of activities within two local education authorities (Essex and Hertfordshire) which aims to establish the structures by which the local

education authorities concerned can meet the economics curriculum and training needs of their schools and teachers. Inevitably, even if such a scheme were ideal it could only be partial, for the availability of resources for such activities (even in a major multinational company and on a 'pump-priming' basis) cannot be sufficient to meet the needs of the nation as a whole. Similarly, the Economics Education 14–16 Project, which has adapted the British Petroleum scheme in co-operation with a number of other local education authorities (some 11 in 1984–85) is unlikely to be able to reach out effectively to all local education authorities.

Such initiatives are partial for other reasons. It can be argued, for example, that their effects will be limited because outcomes are expected before process is established; that support for schools is too short-term and inflexible because it is concentrated in the initial stages rather than consistently and at a time when teachers, having accepted the need for change, are ready to plan its implementation; and that the course-based element (some six days maximum) is sufficient only for needs to be indentified rather than for training to be given.

Any general economic literacy training programme must go further than these initiatives. It must, for example, take into account the difficulties of implementation highlighted in this paper. It must tackle head-on the question as to what economic literacy means, as well as how activity-based approaches can be incorporated into teaching. It must recognize that schools face different constraints, have different starting points, and change at different speeds, and it must therefore be user-focused. It must include provision for longer-term school-based and effective course-based components so that teachers are given the time both for action and for reflection. It must support groups of teachers who can work together and share their classroom experiences because the constraints inside schools on effective curriculum development are recognized.

The incorporation of these and other features into a national economic literacy teacher training programme is a major long-term task and not one which can be carried out by a single project, centre or even a large multinational company. It is a task which can only be implemented by an effective partnership between government (which is responsible for policy and national resource use), local education authorities and their schools (which are responsible for the detailed implementation of the school curriculum and local resource use), the training institutions (who have expertise and training facilities) and industry and commerce (who recognize the need in principle and have resources for educational purposes). This is a challenge which will test the commitment of all with an interest in the future development of economics education.

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